



The National Reserve System

Witchelina, South Australia

Witchelina is a vast conservation area in the arid heartland of South Australia.

Established in 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, the property is an important addition to the National Reserve System – Australia's most secure way of protecting native habitat.

At just over 4,200 square kilometres, more than twice the size of greater Adelaide, Witchelina is the largest property ever purchased for the National Reserve System through Caring for our Country.

Witchelina is owned and managed as a conservation reserve by the Nature Foundation SA. The Nature Foundation purchased the property with almost \$2 million from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative, as well as generous contributions from private donors.

The new reserve forms a vital habitat link from South Australia's Lake Torrens into the Northern Territory, covering almost 10 million hectares. It is part of the world's first transcontinental wildlife corridor being created through the heart of Australia's outback, between Port Augusta and Arnhem Land.

The huge size of this conservation corridor boosts the resilience of the parks and reserves within it, providing opportunities for native species to adapt to a changing climate, fire and drought.

Witchelina and the surrounding area have been hit hard by Australia's long drought, but recent rains and careful management by the Nature Foundation are seeing the property bounce back. When it rains in this arid environment, the creek beds burst with water and wildflowers such as the iconic Sturt's desert pea flourish.



Witchelina's stony plains shelter the leathery gibber dragon and its red sand dunes are home to huge burrowing frogs.

River red gum and coolibah woodlands line the normally-dry creek beds and vulnerable blue bush shrubland dots the landscape. Witchelina's 'old man saltbush' plains and acacia dune-fields provide ideal habitat for threatened small mammals such as the vulnerable dusky hopping mouse and the peregrine falcon. Arid ranges and dune fields are home to a diverse range of reptiles.



When wet, Witchelina's creeks and waterholes act as arid zone refuges for nomadic ducks, sandpipers and other waterbirds. The nationally vulnerable thick-billed grass wren finds it home in chenopod shrublands and in winter, the blue-winged parrot visits Witchelina's grasslands and woodlands from Tasmania.

The property makes an important contribution to Australia's National Reserve System, protecting ecosystems found in very few other parks and reserves.

The purchase of Witchelina dramatically increases habitat protection in two of Australia's most under-protected bioregions. The reserve significantly increases the area protected in the under-represented Flinders Lofty Block bioregion, taking total levels of protection from 5.6 per cent to almost nine per cent. Witchelina also increases protection in the Stony Plains bioregion to 7.35 per cent. The eventual aim is to protect at least 10 per cent of each of Australia's distinct bioregions, so purchases such as Witchelina make an important contribution to our national conservation effort.

Witchelina has a long social history. The property straddles the boundaries of the Adnyamathanha and Arabunna peoples who have continued a strong spiritual connection to their country. After European occupation, Witchelina operated as a pastoral station for more than 140 years.

The property will remain an important part of the local community. Now that Witchelina has been purchased for conservation, the Nature Foundation has removed the small number of remaining sheep and will manage the property according to international standards. Priorities include working with neighbouring landholders to maintain boundary fencing and establish effective feral animal control.



Baseline survey work is planned to get a detailed picture of the reserve's biodiversity. While Witchelina's rare habitat types are well-documented there has been little work in the past to record its native species, so the Foundation anticipates exciting new discoveries especially in plants and reptiles.

For more information about the Nature Foundation SA and Witchelina visit :

www.naturefoundation.org.au

For more information about Australia's National Reserve System please visit:

www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs

For more information about the Trans-Australia Eco-Link please visit:

www.environment.sa.gov.au/naturelinks/ecolink

Photo credits. Front – clockwise from top left: Blue-winged parrot by Pip Buchanan for Wildcare Tasmania; fat-tailed dunnart by Cameron Slatyer; Sturt's desert pea; thick billed grass wren by Babs and Burt Wells (CALM); river red gum by the Nature Foundation. Back - clockwise from top left: peregrine falcon by Andrew Tatnell; Witchelina by the Nature Foundation; emu by Brian Furby.